point in running away from them. It was unnecessary, and it was too easy. They were a "non-custodial facility." Really just a stupid boarding home. All they had on their windows were flimsy screens. They'd not have held a baby's weight, let alone a man or a woman's. There were no wards that one could trick a foot-sore Trixie into thinking one was sleeping in, with a score of sleepers. The landlord's feet were often sore, but he only minded a few shared rooms. Michael was just doing what things did in asylums. Perhaps he figured that if he did it long enough he'd eventually be there physically as well as mentally.

They never found out what he did, though they knew where he went. He probably did nothing at all. Going home by streetcar early in the morning, Babs would see him sipping a coffee on a park bench in a seedy Hogtown neighborhood. Every Hogtown neighborhood was seedy. He could have gone anywhere to sip his coffee, although in most places he couldn't have stayed longer than fifteen minutes. The cheaper coffee shops were more lenient. There were plenty of those where he lived. They couldn't afford to alienate their clientèle. If one loitered in any of these establishments one would eventually notice that a large proportion of the customers had a tick. One would notice that someone was staring too long at his hand. Another was talking to himself. Another was writing. It was more than just a tick however. The whole city was like that. What was the use of running away?

Once a day he'd leave the House to go shopping and come back with a liter bottle of Coke and a small white plastic bag of toiletries. If Johnny saw him returning, huddled and oppressed-looking in a long coat even in the summer, he'd ask him if he wouldn't mind letting him look in the bag. He knew he was intrusive, and his worker would not have approved, but as Deane said, his worker wasn't responsible either.

Of course Johnny knew what Michael wanted. He made a barely perceptible nod, his handsome scratched and bleeding face averted, probably suppressing a smile. He was ready for his close-up now.

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Their conversations were framed by darkness like B-movies.

He'd see Deane in his light-colored clothing against a dark background. After all, he left after six.

The dark background was the night that, starting in October, got noticeably longer every day. It came a few minutes earlier every shift. It was like being on some strange ride at the Circus, after the grounds were closed to normals.

It was the Polar Express headed into winter and eternal night. The riders were Gabriel, Frederick (not Fred), Michael, Jack, Karl, Leon, Charlene, and all the other denizens of Johnny's home.

He and Deane sat together in a gondola. They didn't hold hands.

They tried to keep everyone from panicking and falling out. There wasn't much they could do except tell them, hold on. It was when you tried to get off that you got hurt.

By mid-February it never seemed to end.

The atmosphere changed when it got dark outside the big bay window. It made their crummy room like a parlor again. The bedside table-lamps on the mantle and the little round table weren't just chintzy. They were almost intimate.

Deane's voice was reassuring.

Johnny said he wanted a voice like Deane's was all the time. So smooth it seemed